

Manifesto for the Extreme Poor

অতিদরিদ্রদের ইশতেহার
MANIFESTO
FOR THE EXTREME POOR
EXTREME POVERTY DAY 2012

Bangladesh should be a global leader in 50 years. We have 25 million extremely poor people who are eager to join the labour force and work hard to improve their lives. We have water, land and gas. What we don't have enough of is equitable distribution of resources and pro-poor mindsets. The honourable Prime Minister has committed to making Bangladesh poverty-free by 2021. To achieve this vision, we need a set of clearly outlined steps to follow. To identify these steps, shiree has undertaken an initiative to develop a Manifesto for the Extreme Poor. This manifesto will contain recommendations to address five key challenges that prevent us from eradicating extreme poverty. Poverty eradication is a state obligation. This is not charity. This is about basic human rights and achieving national potential.

THE CHALLENGES

Exclusion from Public Services

The extreme poor are often unable to access much needed public services including health care, education, agricultural support, legal services and a variety of social safety nets. The poorest need to access these services, especially since they have virtually no ability to procure alternatives but they lack the awareness, influence or confidence to demand their entitlements.

Furthermore extremely poor communities often live in remote, hard-to-reach areas where many government services do not venture, and their own lack of mobility means they often have to forgo the services available to those who are better located or more mobile.

Better targeting and collaboration with NGOs could help government service providers reach larger portions of the extreme poor. Access to basic services is an underlying requirement for a secure and stable livelihood and family well-being. This state obligation must be made a priority.

Safe water, hygiene and sanitation services are basic human rights that underpin health, education and livelihoods. More than 18 million people in Bangladesh have no access to sanitary latrines. More than 2.5 million people still use open fields. HIES, 2005

Cyclones, tidal surges and shrimp farming increase the salinity of water sources reducing access to safe drinking water for many people. Water related diseases still continue to count for a majority of infant mortality cases, and increasing salinity leads to its own health issues, especially for pregnant women.



Vulnerability to External Shocks

Extreme poor communities are most severely impacted and least able to recover from the plethora of shocks that occur in Bangladesh. These shocks may be natural (eg cyclone, flood, river erosion) or manmade (eg slum eviction, fire, inter communal conflict). Either way, the effects are devastating, catapulting the victims deeper into poverty.

Major cyclones such as Aila and Sidr, as well as severe waterlogging caused by tidal surges leave thousands of families in the Southern coastal belt stranded on embankments.

During disaster, extreme poor families are uprooted, assets are lost, injuries occur, livelihoods are destroyed and families become fragmented. These families lack assets, savings, insurance, support networks and diverse income sources to help them recover.

Given climate change and rapid urbanization, the frequency of both naturally induced rural and human induced urban disasters is likely to increase.

"I moved to Dhaka because I lost my home to riverbank erosion. I have been living in Korail for almost twenty years and have often heard warnings of eviction, though nothing has happened. This time (April 2012) we were given a warning to remove our shops from the side of the road, which we did. But they bulldozed everything, our home and all our assets from our shop." Rani Akhter and her husband fled their first home as climate refugees and now have lost everything due to eviction.

Studies carried out after a major flood in 2004 showed that flooded households fall into a vicious cycle of debt which pushes flood-hit families below the poverty line.



Over 2 million extremely poor people are elderly and in dire need of state protection.

"I have been a widow for a few months and have no family to support me. My name has been included in the list for widow's allowance. There are not enough cards so they were allocated by lottery. Two other women in the village receive widows' allowances, but not me. This process isn't fair. Disbursement shouldn't be random. People who are most in need should get first priority." Maleka Khatun "nani" is a 60 year widow who has no support and doesn't eat for days.

In 2005, only 13.1% of extreme poor households were covered under the Social Safety Net Programmes. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2007

Health & Nutrition Vulnerabilities

The extreme poor suffer a disproportionate burden of disease. They find it more difficult to access health care and when they do, it is more likely to be of inadequate quality.

There is an inter-generational cycle whereby poor, undernourished mothers give birth to low weight babies, who in turn grow up physically stunted and underweight. The first 1000 days (from conception to 2 years) are generally thought to be the critical period or the "window of opportunity" for both cognitive and physical development. An individual who is stunted in this period of time is unlikely to recover lost growth later in childhood. Cognitive and mental development is also impaired and anaemic children usually have lowered intelligence, poor memory retention and reduced ability to concentrate. The extreme poor are much more vulnerable to being caught in this vicious cycle and to remain chronically poor.

Unless the poor can access affordable, quality health care they are likely to be pushed back further into poverty, both due to the impact of direct health care costs (pharmaceuticals, doctors, hospital fees) and loss of income from the sick and the carers.



11 million children in Bangladesh are extremely poor. Education is the key to breaking the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

More than 20 million people in Bangladesh live in households headed by people with no education. HIES, 2005



Marginalised community members are often excluded from marketplaces. To bring them into the mainstream economy, a push and pull mechanism is needed. On one hand, marginalised people need to know their rights. On the other hand, others need to be motivated to accept and make space for the marginalised.

There are approximately 8 million extremely poor people in urban Bangladesh. In Dhaka alone, 4 million people live in slums.

Over 20 million people in Bangladesh live in homes built of mud and bamboo, or flimsy sheets of tin at most, leaving their shelters vulnerable to floods. An estimated 3.5 million people are affected in every flood event. Prevention Web

THE PROCESS

- Based on our experience with over 200,000 extreme poor households across the nation, we identified 5 key challenges that prevent the poorest from climbing out of poverty.
- Statistics, expert opinions and case studies underpinning each challenge were collected.
- The findings were posted online and a digital e-manifesto was launched. Perhaps this is the first manifesto of this kind.
- Recommendations were solicited online and from the network of development practitioners and experts. Courtyard sessions were organised through partner NGOs to hear what the extreme poor themselves demanded of their government. (Often, we found, they did not know their entitlements and did not actually hold the government responsible for their wellbeing.) We hosted radio phone-in shows. We placed ads in papers and wrote about the Manifesto to our Bangladeshi friends abroad.
- A series of roundtable discussions were organised with Members of Parliament, bureaucrats, local government officers, development workers, donors, academics, private sector leaders and civil society.
- Over 100 recommendations have been collected. We are still collecting, so if you are moved to contribute, please visit our website. www.shiree.org.
- Today, at the Extreme Poverty Day Fair, 5 multi-stakeholder discussions are scheduled to validate the recommendations collected and select a handful of the most critical, actionable steps forward.
- On March 26, 2013, The final Manifesto will be launched and disseminated among relevant stakeholders and political parties. After that, the real work begins!



Children need vitamins and protein.

Over 9% of the population is physically challenged, (HIES, 2005). Less than 0.5% of development budget has been allocated for them in the last 3 fiscal years. Extremely poor communities have a disproportionately high number of disabled people.

15% of shiree beneficiaries suffer chronic illness at enrolment and 85% of children under five are stunted, wasted, anaemic or underweight.

Almost 30 million people live below the recommended daily caloric intake level. BBS, 2005

"I got typhoid and lost both my legs. I became disabled. Since then, no one hires me and people look down on me. People with disabilities need the opportunity to work. I would like to be able to earn and eat and feed my family. I don't want to have to beg." Hashem Ali lives in a slum in Mirpur with his wife and daughter.

Gender & Minority Risks

The scourge of early marriage and dowry, although legislated against, remains prevalent. There are numerous instances of young daughters married off with limited dowry resources to physically or otherwise impaired husbands who agree to marry at lower rates. In these instances, the household becomes "silently female headed" and the young girl is left to support the entire family from whatever meagre earnings she can muster. Often these girls are abandoned by their husbands and are forced back to rely on the charity of poor paternal relatives.

Extreme poor women are even less educated than men and face greater socio cultural constraints in accessing support services or markets.



Other groups excluded by the economic, social or cultural mainstream are also disadvantaged and more likely to remain extremely poor. The aged, the disabled, adivasis, horjians, street dwellers, street children, are among these groups. Steps need to be taken to prevent the structural exclusion of these groups if we are to have a fully inclusive Bangladesh.

"For a day's work in the field, men are paid tk100 - 150, while the women earn tk60 - 70. Though we are working for the same number of hours, we are not paid the same. Whenever we have demanded more the employer would say "Are you a man? Do you have the physical strength to earn the same? I put in the same effort and I go home to take care of my family. I deserve equal pay." Helena Begum lives in a village outside Rangpur with 5 members in her household.

74% of girls in Bangladesh are married off before the age of 18 and over one-third are married off before the age of 15. Unicef, 2012



The girl child is most vulnerable.

Insufficient Economic Opportunities

The extreme poor have no land, no education, no marketable skills and no social network outside of their own underprivileged community. They frequently rely on selling their physical labour on a daily basis, as agricultural or construction workers or housemaids. Such casual daily labour is seasonal, insecure, poorly paid, often hazardous and provides no scope to save for shocks such as ill health.

When these people become ill, old, pregnant, or tasked with the care of small children or ailing parents, they are left with no means to earn a living.

Even in economically dynamic regions, the poorest lack the ability to tap in to this economic success – lacking necessary skills or education, facing constraints such as disability or chronic ill health and lacking the capital to establish or sustain their own micro businesses.

Improving the extreme poor's access to markets, land and skill development opportunities can help them earn a livelihood.

"In my village we are dependent on seasonal day labour. When the harvest is over we have no work and often go hungry. We need more investment in rural areas so we have more opportunities to work and provide for our families." Masud Rana lives in Rangpur district and has been a day labourer all his life. He dreams of finding less strenuous work.

Average per capita income of Shiree beneficiaries on enrolment is typically less than tk18 per day (rural).

Over 8 million youths are without primary education or skills. About half a million children live on streets, exposed to various dangers.



Ill health and old age erode one's ability to earn a living from daily physical labour.

Help us to develop a
MANIFESTO
for the extreme poor



Please visit <http://bit.ly/epmanifesto> and submit your recommendation

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